

TEACHING ELEMENTS DISCUSSION ACTIVITY: VIRTUAL CAFÉ/LOUNGE

VERSION 1.0 | 6/30/14

Description:

In an online course, the instructor creates a Discussion area designated for more informal and off-topic, social exchanges among students.

Benefits:

- Fosters a sense of community and support by providing online learners a way to share common interests, goals, and challenges despite being geographically dispersed.
- Helps 'humanize' the online course experience by cultivating the same kind of casual, social exchanges and interactions that are commonplace in face-to-face learning environments.

Activity Steps

1. The instructor sets up a Discussion Forum that includes a "Virtual Café" topic.
2. Students are invited (but not required) to start up "virtual conversations" on any number of topics of interest unrelated to the course content such as favorite hobbies, vacation plans, sports, and managing the work-life balance.
3. The instructor posts an initial comment that welcomes students to the Virtual Café and explains its benefits.

Tips for this Activity:

- Post an Ice Breaker activity to encourage student participation. For example, encourage students to create and post their own personal "Top Ten List" of strategies for being successful in an online course (Oliver, 2010).

- Encourage students to use the Virtual Café as a place to continue energetic exchanges that have developed in other course-related discussion activities but are unrelated to the main topic(s) being addressed.
- Establish guidelines with students on your expectations for appropriate and respectful discourse outside the bounds of any course-related and/or graded discussion activities.

References

Oliver, K., & Kellogg, S. (2010, March). Increasing student interaction in your online course. Presentation at the Annual Conference of the North Carolina Technology in Education Society (NC-TIES), Raleigh, NC. Retrieved 4/18/14 at: <https://www.fi.ncsu.edu/project/evaluation-of-nc-virtual-public-schools/presentation>